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ART. III.—*On the Preservation of National Literature in the East.* By Colonel F. J. GOLDSMID.

[Read 30th November, 1863.]

Example: *The Sindî Legendary Poem of Sâswî and Punhû.*

ENGLISH translations from Oriental languages are not easily made attractive to the general reader, unless they convey some startling novelty of idea or treatment, a position which they are not often calculated to realise. If literal, they are for the most part verbose or unmeaning; if adaptations to suit the supposed taste of the home public, they become subject to the rules of ordinary criticism, and have seldom the requisite stamina to pass creditably through the ordeal. I have always thought that the true charm of Sa'dî and Háfiz rests more in the language than in the morals or poetry; consequently, that our English versions, however ably executed, are far from doing justice to the original. The airs are for a full orchestra, and we hear them on a piano or street organ. And if the Persian intellect be, as I believe, one which places sound above import, so also may we esteem that of other Eastern nations, whose poets are humble imitators of the Persians. These remarks apply with especial force to the romantic and fanciful schools of poetry, whether expressed after the fashion of an ode, a ballad, or a sonnet. I use intelligible terms, though all may not precisely correspond with the technical requirements of the Asiatic Muse.

At the same time, to arrive at a due estimate of a nation's genius, it will be necessary to know its words as well as its acts; and as comparatively few people, except those upon whom the task falls professionally, have time or inclination to devote themselves to the study of Oriental tongues, the

work of clothing them in European guise cannot be altogether abandoned. But the interpretation of treaties and political dialogues, instructive and necessary as they cannot fail to prove, is not satisfying. We should know something of a people's inner life and sentiment, as expressed by its own approved domestic spokesmen—in plainer words, by its bards and philosophers ; and, in nine cases out of ten, the language of this class is all the more acceptable to us because addressed emphatically to their fellow-countrymen. It comes from and speaks to the heart and the home ; it has no *arrière pensée* on civilized criticism ; it is simply national, and the author knows nothing of “reserving the rights of translation.”

If, then, the literature of distant lands should be valuable to us as an exotic, how much more should it be valued by the people or nation of whose individuality it is the truest and best representative ? Or, putting a case more apposite to the argument about to be offered, how much more is it the part of the civilized rulers of that people or nation to treasure it as perhaps the most endurable inheritance of which they are the trustees ? Amid the many and vast regions brought under her control, England not only bestows crowns and countries, but she imparts liberty and education. More than this : she exercises her discretion in laying down the language or dialect of her conquered provinces. If a grammar be wanted, she directs one to be made ; if an alphabet be incomplete, she calls the attention of her craftsmen to supply the deficiency ; and school-books in the vernacular issue from the press at her command by the dozen. But she cannot create a national literature ; for few will gainsay the assertion that an educational course is a very different thing indeed. That I am not speaking at random, but on facts and experiences, will presently be shown.

A country, to preserve its nationality, should preserve its language and literature ; and where tangible vestiges of the separate existence of both remain, the revival of one should be simultaneous, if possible, with that of the other. It is this feeling which actuates the Magyar of Hungary, who, whether his origin be Fin or Eastern, has been so long a

graft of Central Europe as to have found his second nature there—it is this which actuates him when he rejects the German of his Austrian masters, and clings to his ancestral tongue. In France and Spain the Basque is tenaciously preserved; in our own land the Gaelic, however fallen into disuse, is not suffered to die outright; the Norwegian will not allow the Icelandic wholly to appropriate the old Norse of his forefathers; and so on in many instances. The European instinct is patriotic; while in Asia it is a mere adherence to custom and precedent. The first will admit innovation where it does not interfere with personal liberty; the second abhors all change, from the simple fact that it is change. The Asiatic, that is, *our* Asiatic, would not cut down one tall tree in front of his house, though it obscured the most beautiful view of a whole forest beneath, just because it had been suffered to remain for a whole century before he had become its owner. It must be done for him. At first, he would complain; secondly, he would become reconciled; thirdly, he would forget the whole affair. A very remarkable instance of the revival of a language without a literature, in one of our Indian possessions, will serve to illustrate the meaning here intended, and may not be void of interest.

About twenty years ago, the Province of Sind was conquered by British troops under General Sir Charles Napier, and its people became parts of the mass of Indians who acknowledge the sovereignty of Great Britain. After some five years of occupation, when acquaintance between the governors and governed had so far ripened that administration had become clear and defined to the first, and the last had carefully noted the more salient points of the English character, attention was called to the question of language. There was an acknowledged medium of communication in very general use, called the “Sindí.” Viewed as a mere dialect, its immediate geographical neighbours were the Punjúbí, Jatakí, Multání, and Belúchkí. Each was distinct, and confined to its own ethnological range. But Sindí, as the language of a province, had no recognized written character, and here was the difficulty: one by no means unimportant.

The Ameers of Sind, Belúchís not Sindís themselves, were of a dynasty that had not ruled so long as sixty years before the British conquest; but their followers were no strangers in the land. Many of them had made it the country of their adoption, by virtue of the family settlements there, long prior to the Belúch accession. I have never heard of an attempt made, under this *régime*, to amalgamate Sindí and Belúchkí, or absorb either, but rather that nonchalance prevailed on the subject. Indeed, the reigning family, while retaining the last, did not object to associate with it the first, and could, perhaps, as a general rule, converse freely in both. But Persian was the language of their literature and of their state. No volume of poetry or prose was ever tendered for patronage or acceptance but in that musical tongue; no official report, or record of the most ordinary administrative act, ever issued from the Talpúr bureau in any other guise. Some of the Ameers composed in Persian. I have seen one or two books of which they were professedly the authors. It was a garbled and a vulgar Persian; but it must be borne in mind that this language, in its native purity, is comparatively unknown in India. Arabic was beyond the capacity of the Sindí or Belúch, or would have met with every attention. Under these circumstances it will not be surprising to find that Sindí, the natural language of the province, inasmuch as it bears its distinctive name, was left to be expressed in characters at the option of the writers; consequently, that the custom in this respect was a matter of caste and prejudice. The educated Mussulman wrote, and this but rarely, a language found in a few, and very few old books (strictly speaking, manuscripts), which he had learnt to read, the character of which was Arabic with the admission of Sanscrit points. This is known as the *Arabic-Sindí*. The Hindoo trader kept his correspondence and accounts in a hieroglyphic which was in many cases quite unintelligible to the members of his own firm and family, much more so to his fellow-traders *en masse*. This is known as the *Hindú-Sindí*, because Khudabádí, Gúrúmúkkí, or any more defined term would be wholly incomprehensive. The spoken lan-

guage of the two might have been assimilated without much effort had there been a common alphabet; but, as above stated, none was to be found to meet the exigency.

The adoption of either the Mahomedan or Hindú character as an action of government, would seem to savour of partiality. One argument, however, was greatly in favour of the former in the scales of political justice. Sind, whatever religious revolutions it had undergone, was decidedly a Mahomedan country, and the Mahomedans were sensitively alive to this fact.

Opinion was divided on the point. Reports were called for and submitted, but judgment was reserved. Years passed with no result. The late Captain Stack published a grammar and dictionary of Sindí in the Devanágari character, but the sale of these books was far from encouraging. The fact is, that, the question of an established alphabet being in abeyance, it was hardly to be expected that English or native students of the language would, to gain their ends, choose the medium of a character current indeed on the other side of India, and useful enough at Bombay, but little known to the coast north of Guzerat. Eventually, the verdict was in favour of Arabic-Sindí; and in order to suit the alphabet to the several sounds required, one new letter and the modifications of other letters were introduced among those heretofore in use in the old Mahomedan manuscripts to which allusion has been made. In 1852 it became the official character of the province. Alphabets were circulated in sheets among the schools and public offices; educational works were lithographed, to turn the alphabet to practical account; and all candidates for government employ were required to master the character for official purposes.

That the effect upon the Mahomedans was not thoroughly satisfactory, may be learned from the following brief extracts of an Educational Report submitted by me in 1858. It was not the quality of the written Sindí to which they objected, but they could not see the object in making Sindí a written language at all:—

“The existence of the book known as ‘*Hikáyut us Sáliheen*,

or Narratives of Holy Men, in the Arabic-Sindí character, is a sufficient warrant for the adoption of the latter by Mussulmans, but they do not take to the new books printed with the same readiness exhibited by the Hindoos. I attribute the cause to the little influence exercised, or attempted to be exercised, by the Akhoonds; for where these books have been successfully taught, the success has been surprising. The pabulum is actually devoured: it is seized upon by smart lads as their daily food. The misfortune is that they have not more. They would consume twenty times the amount if set before them.

“It has been the fashion in this country (Sind), for many years, to consider the Persian language to contain all polite learning and literature, while Arabic has represented all that was venerable and scholastic in letters. The neglected ‘Sindí,’ without any one acknowledged character, became the medium of ordinary verbal communication, peculiar to the lips of the ‘Langhas,’ or minstrels, and those who learned by heart their legends. Such fashion had grown into inveterate custom about the period of the conquest; and it is no easy matter to dispel at once a tacit belief that, in substituting a native for a foreign tongue, we are preferring bazár-made tinsel to imported gold.

“Another difficulty to be met is the existence of pseudo-learned men; that is, of a certain set of individuals crammed with the more palpable lore of Arabic schools, without the smallest conception of its application to any useful purposes. Such as these would deem a recitation of the ten Predicaments of Aristotle to be a greater passport to favour and applause than any amount of sound practical knowledge; and their persuasions are not without force.”

The Hindús of Sind are, for the greater part, either Ámils, that is, candidates for the Government Service, or Banyans, the traders or shopkeepers. With the former the alphabet had great success; with the latter it produced, as might have been expected, no fruits whatever: it was a dead letter for all commercial purposes. But so far from Hindú-Sindí being put aside, a question was next raised whether the measure

successfully introduced into the Punjab of employing Devanágari to the exclusion of the Khyasthi character could not be carried out in the sister province. To this it was replied—

1. That the Mussulman would never be brought to write the proposed Hindú-Sindí character, supposing that to be the established alphabet, nor would the trading Hindú readily desert the character in which his fathers and forefathers had ever kept their accounts. Not an instance could be recalled of a Mahomedan using or understanding Gúrúmúkkí or Khudabádí. And to establish the Arabic letters and punctuation for entries in a native *vái* or *roznámehé* would be a measure productive of endless confusion.

2. It was proposed, however, to introduce, in the course of instruction laid down for provincial schools, a Hindú-Sindí alphabet in addition to the Arabic or Mussulman Sindí alphabet now used in official records. This would not alter the arrangement by which the latter had become the acknowledged character of the province, but would merely furnish material for a new branch of study, required almost solely for a mercantile community.

No further objection having been offered to its progress, and time having done its preliminary part, the resuscitation of Arabic-Sindí may now be considered a *fait accompli*. The staple having thus been strengthened, let us now see what has been done in the way of manufacture.

I have not a list at hand of the numerous educational works, chiefly of an elementary character, which have been published at the Sind Lithographic Press. But it may be noted that a whole set was presented by me, through the Bombay Government, to the International Exhibition, and may, perhaps, be still available for inspection. In the wish to give them a respectable appearance, and at the same time enhance their nationality, the fault was committed of clothing them in Hyderabad embroidered cloth. For this the blame rests upon myself. The result has unfortunately been that an offering intended as a specimen of educational advancement in one of our comparatively new territorial acquisitions, has been con-



verted into a specimen of manual dexterity, and the shell exhibited to the prejudice of its contents.

Among these specimens was a small pamphlet containing a Sindí Poem, entitled Sáswí and Punhú. It was one of a series which I had hoped to have collected as contributions to the Educational Library in Sind, a measure approved by the Director of Public Instruction in Bombay; but experience soon proved to me that, to get a worthy record of this description of literature, more time and labour would be requisite than were ordinarily at my disposal. The case of Sáswí and Punhú may be cited as one illustrative of all these legends and romances, among which it stands first in popularity. Unless where one manuscript had been transcribed from another manuscript, or prepared in duplicate, it would be almost impossible to obtain two copies exactly alike. The story had hitherto existed solely in the memory of the minstrels, or in single copies obtained at different times by different persons. Like the Sindí language itself, spoken by many, written by few, and without a common character acknowledged by any, so was the traditionary poem. It was recited by many, seldom criticised, and no set version recognised. Not improbably, the story was a mere theme, and the more the narrator could vary his words from recital to recital, the greater to his professional credit. He was not an *improvisatore*, but a player of variations: although an *improvisazione* is not rare in the East. The Chárans or religious bards of the desert S.E. of Sind, bordering on Cutch and Joudhpoor, are remarkable instances in point.

The present copy of Sáswí and Punhú was obtained by the agency of two intelligent natives in the Office of the Commissioner in Sind during a recent cold weather tour throughout that province. Two papers were written down from two recitations, each independent of the other, and the results collated. In rendering the tale into English metre of not unfamiliar nine feet measure, I must disclaim any more ambition than that of endeavouring to imitate the rhythm and convey some notion of the character, as well as to follow the literal meaning of the original; making the version use-

ful, if need be, to the student of Sindí. Here and there I have been compelled to deviate from the precise letter of the verse, but not, I hope, to that extent to nullify the last-named object. Captain Richard Burton, H.M. Consul at Fernando Po, an officer whose extraordinary talents as a linguist and an explorer present a combination of which we may be at a loss to find a parallel in the present day, has detailed the argument so skilfully in the fourth chapter of his History of Sind (I wish he had called it "Sind and its Inhabitants"), that a very few words will suffice to sketch it at second hand.

Sáswí was the daughter of a Brahmin of Thátta. At her birth, it was foretold by the astrologers that she would forsake the religion of her fathers. This prediction so terrified the parents that they placed the infant in a coffer, and committed her to the waters of the Indus. She was found by a washerman, taken to the town of Bhambora, and brought up there.

Some years afterwards, Punhú Khán, a young Belúch chief of Mekrán, heard of the charms of the foundling, then verging on womanhood, obtained access to her house in disguise, wooed, won, and married her. His indignant father, Jám Ári, of Kedje, hearing of the match, caused him to be seized and carried forcibly back to his home. Sáswí, wild at the separation, started off on foot in quest of her lord. On her journey, after various mishaps, she came in the way of a hill barbarian, who attempted to gain possession of her. She prayed for relief, and was instantly swallowed up in the earth !

A similar fate awaited Punhú, who soon after arrived at the same spot, like Romeo, found his Juliet departed, and courted death as the only remedy for his woe.

The story of Mahomed Cassim's invasion is too well known to readers of Asiatic annals to need repetition even in abstract. It is only now further alluded to, because it is popularly considered the conquest of Sind, when, in reality, it must rather have been the overwhelming irruption of Mahomed of Ghizni which subjugated the province. The immediate successors of Mahomed Cassim effected but a partial occupation. Let it be

granted that the Arabs colonized, and changed much of the old-established order of things. They shivered the Pagan staff, as at Déwul, and ridiculed the idol worship, as at Alore; but the huge Sanscrit tree had its thousand ramifications, and these were not to be uprooted by a comparative handful of adventurers. As with the peculiar genius of the country and people invaded, so with their language. Intolerance and forcible conversion became the order of the day. The broken stick and trampled image may be likened to the written character or outward symbol. As the mosque and minaret were founded amid the subverted temples and shrines of Indian mythology, so was the stately letter of the Koran driven into the many-phased Indian alphabet. Hence the old manuscript language, whose renewal under the name of Arabic-Sindí has been described.

That Kedje Mekrán, the neighbouring country to Sind, was ruled by a chief designated "Jám," proves the power of the Semmas to the westward, two centuries before they became the sovereigns of Sind itself. Usually considered a race of Rajputs, their descendants are now traceable in the Jharejas of Cutch, and the Sind Semmas and Jokyas of the present day—the first adhering to the idolatry of their ancestors, the second so bigoted to Mahomedanism as to reject wholly the truth of their Hindú origin. But there is evidence to make the Judgáls or Zudgáls of Sus Beyla Semmas also; and we find this large section still exercising a *quasi* independent authority not only over 240 miles of coast from Kurrachee westward, but as far to the west as the boundary of the Muscat Imám's territory of Chinbár, namely, between the meridians  $60^{\circ} 40'$ , and  $61^{\circ} 40'$  E. lon. In Kurrachee, the Jokyas are the aboriginal owners of the soil; and eastward in Cutch the Jharejas are the reigning dynasty. The title of Jám, which was probably assumed by the first Semma converts to Mahomedanism, from their supposed ancestor Jamshíd, was peculiar to the Tháttah sovereigns of Lower Sind in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as it is now hereditary with the chief of the Jokyas and the ruler of Beyla. The facts afford matter of much interesting inquiry

to the ethnologist—an inquiry which has yet to be carried to satisfactory results.

But though history and chronology may not derive valuable aid from our poem, it has merits of its own more akin to those which may reasonably be looked for in a popular Oriental legend thought worthy of revival. Novelty of plot can hardly be expected in a story at least five hundred years old, but novelty of incident will not, perhaps, be found wanting. The adventures of the young Belúch chief Punhú Khán, when, disguised as a washerman, he finds access to the house of Sáswí's supposed father, himself a washerman, are told with piquancy and humour. He is required to show his professional skill, clumsily batters the clothes to pieces against the washing-stone in endeavouring to cleanse them, then hits on the successful device of quieting the owners by placing a gold coin in each one's bundle. I greatly regret the incompleteness as well as prolixity in the version which I have procured; and I say this the more strongly because the extracts given in Captain Burton's work on Sind lead me to believe that he must have obtained a better one. Not that I grudge him the triumph due to his own perseverance and discrimination; but that it is to be feared the genius of the Sindí bard has deteriorated from want of practice and encouragement under British occupation. My Múnshi appropriated, at my own suggestion, two of the extracts, and these two will be found, in stanzas 65 and 74 of the lithographed poem Arabicized from Captain Burton's Romanized Sindí. It should be noted, however, that Captain Burton, speaking of the translations and specimens of the tales and songs most admired by Sindís, which he presents to the public, explains that his MS. is a small one of about thirty pages, in Sindí and Persian both. This leads me to believe that he could not have possessed complete copies of each poem; and this impression is confirmed in the case of Sáswí and Punhú, by the statement that his poet plunges *in medias res*, neglecting his prolegomena. Now my poet, though less eloquent than Captain Burton's, begins at the beginning of his subject.

Another version of Sáswí and Punhú was obtained some

four or five years ago by Dr. Trumpp, of the Church Missionary Society. Had this erudite gentleman given to the world his collection of Sindí Poems, the present attempt would have been superfluous. But I am apprehensive that, if they do appear at all, it will be in a guise foreign to that approved by Government. Dr. Trumpp objects to the *Arabic-Sindí* character, upon philological principles, and prefers the *Urdú*, which, he contends, can be rendered equally applicable to the expression of Sindí sounds. Without recording an unsustained opinion on this point, I cannot but hope that the missionaries will adopt the Government letter. A point of philology is surely not so important to their great objects as the use of a character generally understood throughout the province by all educated Sindís, except the strictly mercantile class, who steadily refuse to receive any character but their own. Without fighting the philological battle, I may confidently assert that the *Arabic-Sindí* is so understood, is day by day becoming more firmly rooted, and that the *Urdú-Sindí* is comparatively illegible to natives, even in Dr. Trumpp's admirably clear type. Under these circumstances, to revert to my starting-point, it is deferentially submitted that a collection of all original, semi-original, and popular traditional literature in Sind, in the revived and recognised character, will be more valuable to the student of the Sindí language, and more acceptable to the province itself, than educational translations, however well executed and useful. But early measures should be taken to preserve these traditions, for they are liable to deterioration under the influence of Western civilisation. It is not intended that education should relax a jot, or make way for these revivals; only that it should not throw them into too cold a shadow, when sunlight is required.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above, I learn that Government sanction has been given to the publication of Dr. Trumpp's valuable Sindí collections. Had these appeared before the results above noted had been obtained, my humble advocacy would not, in all probability, have been offered on behalf of the "*Arabic-Sindí*." As it is, I see no cause to modify the opinion recorded. Under any circumstances, the people themselves should be the best judges of their own alphabet, and will, doubtless, be allowed to confirm or modify the choice heretofore made.

To conclude. A recent exploration on the Mekrán coast caused me to make inquiries on the scenery of the little drama of Sáswí and Punhú. By one I was informed that the lovers' resting place is in the "Pubbúni" pass of the hills dividing Sind from Beyla; by another that it is at Mount Phir, some miles to the westward. The former notion is that commonly received. The pass is now little frequented, owing to its many difficulties, and the vicinity, both north and south, of simple routes. The legend seems just as well known in Beyla as in Sind.

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